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Upper North Platte Analysis Scoping Report

Brush Creek/Hayden and Parks Ranger Districts

MEDICINE BOW-ROUTT NATIONAL FORESTS &
THUNDER BASIN NATIONAL GRASSLAND

Carbon County, Wyoming
Jackson County, Colorado

T.12N. R.80W., R.81W., R.82W. & R.83W.
T.13N. R.80W., R.81W., R.82W. & R.83W.
T.14N. R.81W.

Responsible Official: **Scott Armentrout**
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INTRODUCTION

The Forest Service is seeking public input on a proposal to revise the management plans for three grazing allotments located within the *Upper North Platte Analysis Area*, and to implement Phase 2 of the Forest-wide Travel Management Environmental Assessment in the Snowy Range portion of the analysis area. The allotments under consideration are: *Beaver Creek, Big Creek, and Six Mile.*

The analysis area is located on the Brush Creek/Hayden and Parks Ranger Districts of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, approximately 10 miles southeast of Encampment, Wyoming, and 15 miles west of Cowdrey, Colorado. Located on the eastern end of the Sierra Madre Range and along the southwest edge of the Medicine Bow Range, the allotments are being analyzed together because of their proximity to one another and similarities in terrain and vegetation.

The Medicine Bow National Forest is on a 15-year schedule to update and revise allotment management plans (AMPs) as mandated by the 1995 Rescissions Act. Since that time many allotments have undergone updated rangeland analysis with resultant update and revisions of the AMPs as needed. Allotment Management Plans are developed using the goals and objectives as well as the standards and guidelines of the approved Forest Plan. More specific grazing prescriptions can be developed during the allotment planning process to address site-specific resource issues and opportunities.

Based on a review of the existing conditions, Forest Plan(s) standards and guidelines, desired condition, and resource management needs, preliminary proposals to the *Beaver Creek, Big Creek, and Six Mile* allotment management plans include rangeland vegetation improvement, grazing structural improvement, and travel management.

Part of the implementation of Phase 2 of the Forest-Wide Travel Management Environmental Assessment (October 16, 2000), the travel management proposal will determine whether or not unplanned and unmanaged user-created roads and trails will be added to the Forest Transportation System, and if existing Forest Transportation System routes should remain open or closed to motorized vehicle use. The analysis will also look at whether or not additional motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities should be developed and added to the area's system. The area in which travel management will be reviewed includes the area bordering the North Platte River, which includes Six Mile Allotment and the Black Cat Pasture of Big Creek Allotment. Travel management in the remainder of the Wyoming portion of the analysis area (Sierra Madre portion) was covered under the Blackhall-McAnulty Decision.

This project was first identified on the January 2003 Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests & Thunder Basin National Grassland Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). A scoping letter was mailed to interested parties on March 10, 2003. However, at that time, the proposal did not include travel management, and since that time, the Medicine Bow National Forest 2003 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan has been approved, therefore, scoping is being reinitiated.

The Forest Service will prepare an Environmental Assessment to analyze and disclose the environmental effects of these proposals. Although the analysis will include allotment management plan revision and travel management, separate decision documents may be issued for each proposal.

This scoping report contains background information on these proposals. Scoping is an integral part of the environmental analysis process. It provides an opportunity for you to express your opinions about site-specific areas on the Forest that are being considered for possible projects or proposed actions. The purpose of scoping is to identify issues and concerns related to the proposed action(s). In addition, scoping may identify additional information and management opportunities that may be incorporated into the proposed action(s), as well as formulating alternatives to the proposed action(s).

The District Ranger has determined that the scoping period is the most effective timing for the 30-day comment period on the proposed actions [36 CFR 215.5(2)]. This will be the only opportunity for the public to comment before decisions on these projects are issued.

EXISTING CONDITION

The Upper North Platte Analysis Area includes the eastern end of the Sierra Madre Range, from Wood Mountain and Blackhall Mountain eastward, and the narrow strip of foothill terrain along the west side of the North Platte River. It also extends a short way into Colorado in the vicinity of Buffalo and Damfino parks. The southernmost boundary is Buffalo Ridge. Because it takes in National Forest land on both sides of the Colorado-Wyoming border, it is located on both the Medicine Bow and Routt National Forests and within Carbon County, Wyoming and Jackson County, Colorado. See Figure 1.

Encompassing approximately 62,068 acres, 96% is National Forest System lands. The remainder (approximately 2,515 acres) is a mix of private, Bureau of Land Management, and Wyoming State land. Elevation ranges from 7,400 feet along the North Platte River to 10,979 feet at the summit of Blackhall Mountain.

Most of the Medicine Bow portion of the analysis area is situated in the Beaver Creek Geographic Area (GA), with a small portion in the Encampment River and Platte River GAs. The Routt portion of the analysis area includes portions of two Geographic Areas: Encampment River and Big Creek. It also includes 3,756 acres of the Platte River Wilderness in Wyoming and 509 acres of the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness in Colorado. Very little of the North Platte Wilderness or the Mt. Zirkel Wilderness within these allotments is actually grazed by livestock because the majority is too heavily forested and/or too steep for use by cattle.

The analysis area is located within the North Platte River watershed, and includes portions of the Big Creek and Beaver Creek watersheds. The topography is rugged, with suitable grazing areas separated by steep-sided ridges and peaks. Vegetation at the higher elevations is primarily spruce-fir and lodgepole pine forest, with sagebrush and bitterbrush dominating at lower elevations. Small stands of aspen, Douglas fir, and ponderosa pine occur at the transition zone between shrublands and coniferous forest.

Because the analysis area is large and encompasses a 4,000-foot elevational span, it includes habitat or potential habitat for most of the animal species that occur on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests. It includes both summer and winter habitat for mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and moose, with most of the winter range located on Six Mile Allotment and portions of Big Creek Allotment. Pronghorn antelope and sage grouse occasionally use the lower elevation areas along the Forest Boundary. The bald eagle is the only federally listed Threatened or Endangered species known to occur within the analysis area. Potential habitat for the Canada lynx, a threatened species, also exists.

Recreation

Camping, hunting, and fishing are popular recreational activities in the area. One developed campground exists within the analysis area at Six Mile, and dispersed camping occurs at many locations throughout the analysis area, especially during hunting season. There is a popular launch/take-out site at Six Mile Campground for rafters and boaters floating the North Platte River. There are three designated hiking trails within the analysis area: Big Creek Trail and Platte River Trail in Wyoming, and the Buffalo Ridge Trail in Colorado.

Motorized travel via four-wheel-drive vehicle, all-terrain-vehicle and dirt bike is becoming increasingly common during the summer and early fall, and some snowmobiling occurs during the winter.

Roads

The area in which travel management will be reviewed includes the area bordering the North Platte River, which includes Six Mile Allotment and the Black Cat Pasture of Big Creek Allotment. A preliminary analysis revealed that there are a number of roads within the area requiring maintenance and/or repairs to reduce soil erosion and sediment entering area creeks. In addition, high open road density could potentially be degrading wildlife security areas and habitat. The popularity of ATV use in the vicinity has led to the creation of a number of user created trails throughout the area.

Livestock Grazing

The three allotments within the analysis area are Beaver Creek, Big Creek, and Six Mile. Big Creek and Beaver Creek Allotments are located on the eastern end of the Sierra Madre Range. Beaver Creek Allotment extends down onto the Parks District on the Colorado side of the Colorado/Wyoming State Line. Six Mile Allotment and one disjoint pasture of Big Creek Allotment are located along the southwest edge of the Medicine Bow Range, along the western side of the North Platte River. These allotments are being analyzed together because of their proximity to one another and similarities in terrain and vegetation. See Figure 2.

Cattle have grazed all three grazing allotments within the analysis area since the early 1900's. Each allotment is under permit to a single permittee, for a total of three permittees running cattle within the analysis area. From the early 1900's to the 1950's, these allotments were overstocked and grazing was heavy. Since that time, stocking has been incrementally reduced and multi-pasture rotational grazing systems were implemented to improve rangeland conditions.

Because of the combination of steep terrain and coniferous forest cover with relatively little understory forage in many parts of the analysis area, only about 30 % is considered capable range. Capable rangelands include those areas that are accessible to livestock and have suitable types and amounts of forage and water available. Rangelands suitable for livestock grazing within the analysis area include sagebrush/grass, mixed mountain shrub/grass, aspen forest, and riparian meadows. Of the capable rangeland acres in this analysis area, only about half are considered primary range. Primary range includes those parts of the capable range that livestock naturally prefer or will use first under extensive management. Capable rangelands that are not primary range are classed as secondary range. Livestock capacity estimates are based upon primary range only.

Table 1. Allotment Acres

Allotment	Gross Acres	NFS Acres	NFS Acres Open to Livestock Grazing	Capable NFS Acres	Primary Range Acres
Beaver Creek	34,932	33,485	26,913	4,944	2,218
Big Creek	20,735	19,667	19,654	9,247	4,421
Six Mile	6,401	6,401	3,865	2,185	1,615
TOTAL	**62,068**	**59,553**	**50,432**	**16,376**	**8,254**

A majority of National Forest land (98%) within the analysis area is in satisfactory condition, which means it is similar to the desired condition and/or is moving toward the desired condition. Unsatisfactory condition rangeland occurs on approximately 2% of the National Forest acres within the analysis area (1,097 acres) and constitutes 7% of the capable range (for livestock).

Monitoring has documented utilization levels in some portions of the allotments that are periodically above the maximum allowable use standards prescribed by the Forest Plans, and these high use levels are a primary cause of **some** of the unsatisfactory rangelands. However, not all unsatisfactory condition rangeland is caused by present day livestock use. Other causal factors include: changes in soils or plant species composition from heavy historical use by livestock; introduction of noxious weeds and other invasive non-native plants; heavy grazing and/or browsing by elk and deer in localized areas; four consecutive years of severe drought (2000-2003); establishment of a colony of white-tailed prairie dogs in an area where they had not previously occurred (Six Mile Allotment); and soil compaction and trampling of vegetation in frequently used dispersed campsites and on user-created roads.

Upland Rangelands

Only a few acres of uplands are in unsatisfactory condition due to present day livestock grazing or trampling impacts. These sites are mostly at fence corners, salt grounds and small loafing grounds where cattle congregate. They are normally considered an acceptable by-product of multiple use, just as are other small heavily impacted areas such as dispersed campsites, parking areas and vehicle turn-around spots, timber sale landings and skid trails, and road drainage ditches.

Riparian Areas and Wet Meadows

Approximately 82% of the riparian acres within the analysis area are considered to be in satisfactory rangeland management status. They are in fair to good condition relative to their potential and continue to move closer to desired condition over time. This means that approximately 400 acres of riparian and wet meadow habitat are in unsatisfactory rangeland management status. They are in fair condition relative to their potential. Most of the undesirable changes in plant species composition probably occurred during the period of heavy historical use, but present day use levels appear to be slowing or preventing improvement. These sites include:

Big Creek Allotment:
- Reaches of the north, middle and south forks of Big Creek within Holroyd, Cunningham, and Big Creek parks.
- Riparian areas within shrubland communities along the Forest Boundary, including Black Cat Pasture

Beaver Creek Allotment:
- Small meadows in the Quimby Park/Quimby Creek area
- The lower 3/8 mile of Little Beaver Creek, near the Forest boundary

Six Mile Allotment:
- Small wetlands/seeps and the upper ¼ to ½ mile of wet or intermittently wet draws in the North, Campground, Middle and South pastures.

Figure 1 – Vicinity Map

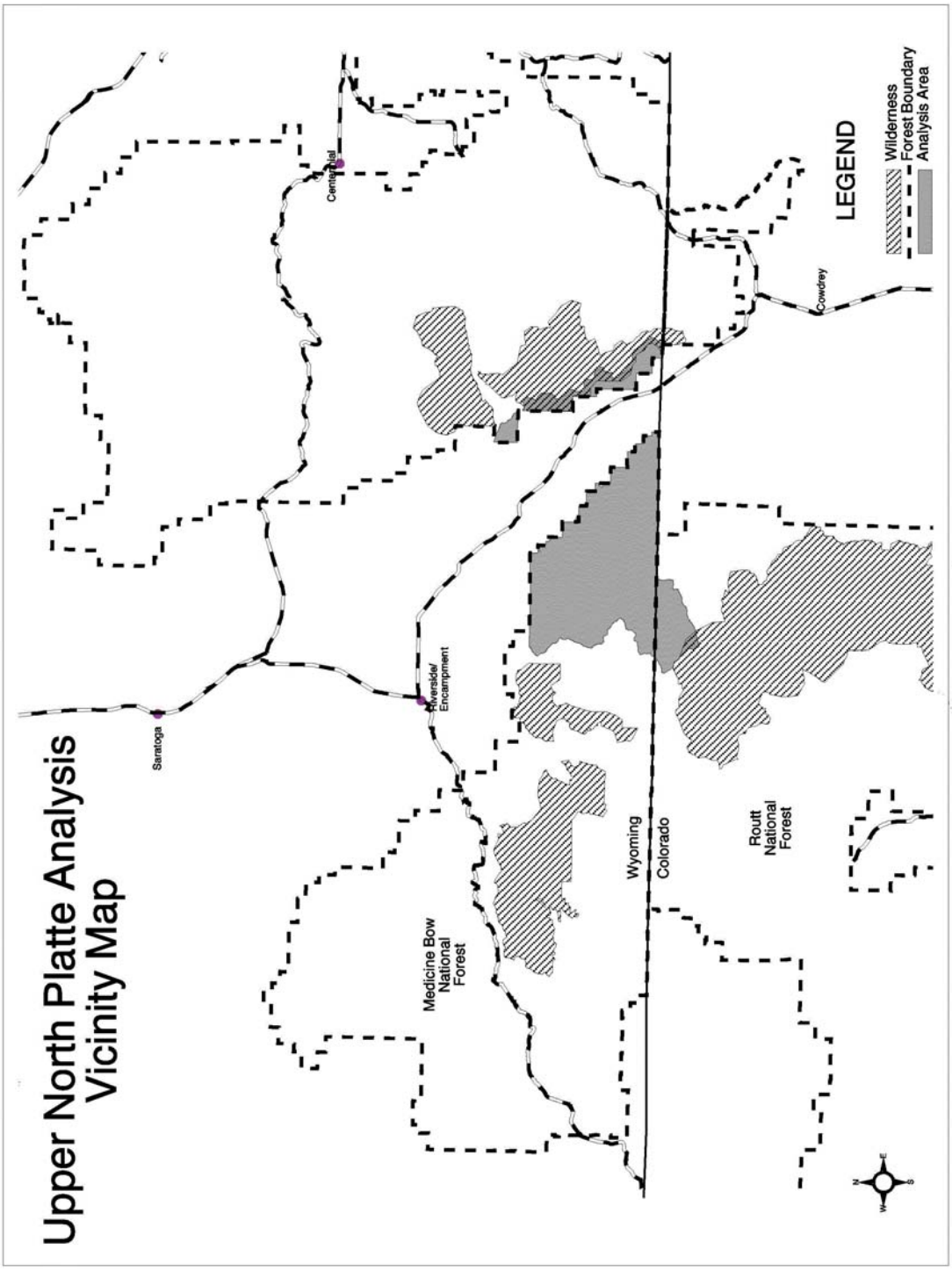
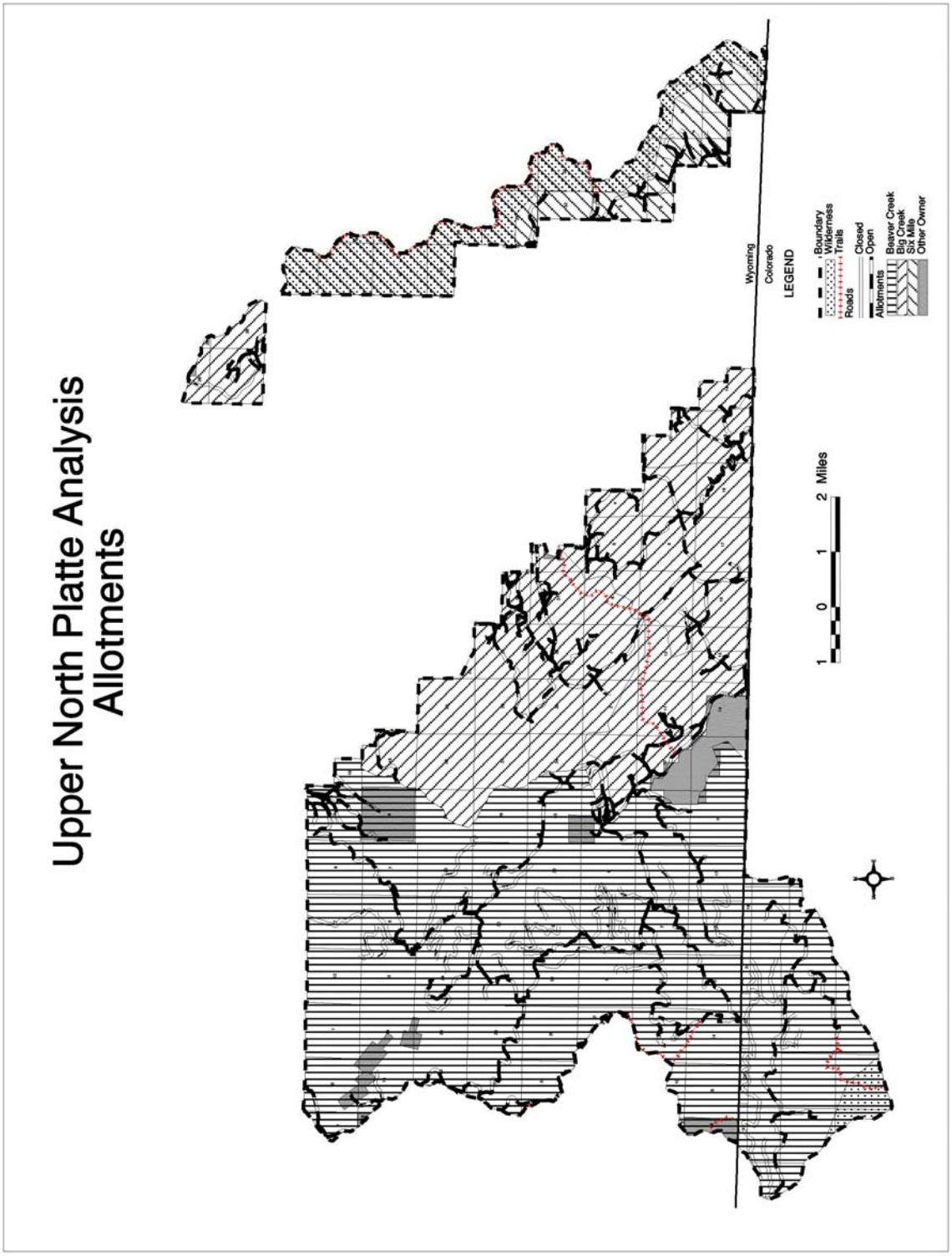


Figure 2 - Grazing Allotments



DESIRED CONDITION

The Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 1997 Revision and the 2003 Medicine Bow National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plans) guide natural resource management activities and provide an overall strategy for managing the Forests. The intent of the direction in the Forest Plans is to manage National Forest System (NFS) lands for multiple uses. The Forest Plans include specific direction on how to manage different land areas, or management areas. Based on the desired condition of the overall Forest, desired condition statements for individual Management Areas and Geographic Areas on the Forests have been developed. Each Management Area has a different management emphasis wherein specific uses are emphasized over other uses.

A desired condition is developed, based on what exists now, knowledge of how it got that way, what is ecologically possible, what is economically feasible, and what is socially desirable. A description of a desired future condition provides the management goals for an area. Goals for each resource are based on the general desired condition discussed in the Medicine Bow Forest Plan (pp. 1-13 through 1-24) and the Routt Forest Plan pp.1-3 through 1-4).

Direction in the Forest Plan is identified at several levels including:

- **Forest-wide level Management Direction** (Desired Conditions, Goals & Objectives, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Management Area Direction** (Management Area Desired Conditions, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Geographic Area Direction** (Desired Condition, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Project Level Direction** (Project Decision Documents)

Forest-wide level Management Direction:

Forest Plan direction is implemented with the most site-specific direction superceding the more general direction. The two Forest Plans contain the following direction that is pertinent to this analysis and to the activities identified for the analysis area:

Range Management

- Manage vegetation toward a desired plant community, vegetative condition, or seral status, to be determined during the development of Allotment Management Plans. ***(Range Standard)***
- Manage all suitable rangeland to remain at or be moving toward satisfactory management status. ***(Range Standard)***
- Move livestock from the grazing unit, pasture, or allotment when further utilization on key areas will exceed allowable use criteria. ***(Livestock Use Standard)***

- Phase out season-long grazing in an allotment, except where determined necessary to achieve or maintain the desired plant community. ***(Livestock Use Standard)***
- Coordinate livestock grazing on rangelands to provide adequate cover and forage for wildlife. ***(Livestock Use Standard)***
- Maintain or improve long-term levels of organic matter and nutrients on all lands. ***(Soil Standard)***
- In the water influence zone next to perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, and wetlands, allow only those actions that maintain or improve long-term stream health and riparian condition. ***(Water and Aquatic Standard)***
- Maintain long-term ground cover, soil structure, water budgets, and flow patterns in wetlands to sustain their ecological function, per 404 regulations. ***(Water and Aquatic Standard)***
- Design activities to protect and manage the riparian ecosystem. Maintain the integrity of the ecosystem including quantity and quality of water. ***(Water and Aquatic Standard)***
- Conduct actions so that stream patterns, geometry, and habitats are maintained or improved toward robust stream health. ***(Water and Aquatic Standard)***
- Prohibit concentrated livestock use in wet meadows, fens, peatlands, and bog habitats. ***(Biological Diversity Standard)***

Travel Management

- Decommission unneeded travelways to achieve resource objectives or where resource damage cannot be mitigated. ***(Infrastructure–Travelways Guideline)***
- Apply seasonal restrictions as needed on motorized use of travelways to reduce disturbance in sensitive big game areas, such as birthing areas and winter range. ***(Wildlife Standard)***

Geographic Area Direction:

Analyses at the geographic area level provide a framework for short and long-term projects, for monitoring the effectiveness of Forest-wide goals and management area standards and guidelines, and for achieving Forest-wide goals and objectives.

A geographic area (GA) is a watershed or aggregation of watersheds, 125,000 acres or smaller, in which management is directed toward achieving a specified desired condition. Geographic areas link the Forest Plan to management at a landscape or watershed scale. Application of management area prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines will move specific portions of each geographic area towards the desired condition (Forest Plans, p. 3-1). The analysis area includes portions of four (4) Geographic Areas:

Beaver Creek (Medicine Bow)
Platte River (Medicine Bow)
Encampment River (Medicine Bow & Routt)
Big Creek (Routt)

Management Area Direction:

Management emphasis within the analysis area and larger geographic areas is distributed among several Forest Plan management area prescriptions (see table below). Application of management area prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines will move specific portions of each geographic area towards the desired condition (Med Bow Forest Plan, p. 3-1). The descriptions of each management area prescription include: theme, setting, desired condition, and standards and guidelines. This information can be found in the Forest Plans, Chapter 2. The two Forest Plans contain the following management area direction that is pertinent to this analysis and to the activities identified for the analysis area:

- Allow uses and activities only if they do not degrade the semi-primitive character of the area. ***(MB Plan MA 1.13, p. 2-6)***
- Allow livestock facilities that do not detract from the semi-primitive character of the area. ***(MB Plan, MA 1.31, p. 2-12)***
- Manage livestock grazing to minimize conflicts with scenic river values. Design rangeland improvements to be compatible with scenic river values. ***(MB Plan MA 3.4, p. 2-40)***
- Use fire, thinning, timber sales, grazing and other tools to maintain or restore habitat to conditions within the expected range of variation. ***(MB Plan MA 3.5, p. 2-43)***
- Allow uses and activities only if they do not degrade the characteristics for which the area was designated. Include achievement of wildlife goals for deer and elk in grazing strategies. Wherever possible, develop livestock grazing systems in cooperation with federal, state and local agencies, permittees and private landowners to ensure that all lands are considered when determining vegetation management objectives for the area. ***(MB Plan MA 3.58, p. 2-49-50)***
- Restrict motorized use to designated routes as identified in GA direction from November 15 – April 30. Close roads as needed to prevent disturbance during the winter and during fawning/calving periods. ***(MB Plan MA 3.58, p. 2-50)***
- Manage vegetation to maintain or restore healthy ecological conditions through a variety of management activities. ***(MB Plan MA 5.15, p. 2-63)***
- Use fencing to exclude grazing from developed recreation sites. ***(MB Plan MA 8.21, p. 2-72)***
- Manage forage for livestock and wildlife based on specific habitat area objectives identified during allotment management plan revision. ***(Routt Plan MA 5.11, p. 2-40)***

Table 2. Management Area Distribution within the Analysis Area

#	Management Area Prescription	Acres in AA
	Medicine Bow NF	
1.13	Wilderness, Semi-primitive (Platte River Wilderness)	3,756
1.31	Backcountry Recreation, Year-round Nonmotorized	9,449
3.4	National River System, Scenic Rivers Designated and Eligible	371
3.5	Forested Flora and Fauna Habitats, Limited Snowmobiling	2,402
3.58	Crucial Deer & Elk Winter Range	13,894
5.15	Forest Products, Ecological Maintenance and Restoration	22,982
8.21	Developed Recreation (Six Mile Campground)	44
8.6	Administrative Sites	1
	Routt NF	
1.12	Wilderness, Primitive (Mount Zirkel Wilderness)	509
5.11	General Forest and Rangelands – Forest Vegetation Emphasis	6,145
	TOTAL	**59,553**

Forest Plan(s) standards and guidelines are designed to maintain and improve rangeland conditions. Desired rangeland vegetation conditions are specified for individual allotment areas and grazing systems are designed to achieve and maintain the desired conditions. Allowable forage utilization is stipulated on a site-specific basis and is dependent on the type and condition of vegetation present, soil and water concerns, and season and intensity of grazing. When allowable utilization meets prescribed levels, livestock are moved from the pasture or grazing area or removed from the allotment for the season.

The desired condition for rangelands is to have plant communities dominated by a diverse suite of native species appropriate to the habitat type. Vigor of native species should be high, and there should be a minimum presence of noxious weeds or other invasive species. A variety of age classes of both upland and riparian shrubs should be present across the landscape, indicating that this component will be present into the future. There should be good ground cover from a combination of live plants and plant litter in order to provide soil stability and optimum water retention in the watershed.

In riparian areas, streambank vegetation should be comprised of those plants or plant communities with root masses capable of withstanding high stream flow events. Streambanks and wetlands should show little evidence of mechanical damage beyond what is natural for the stream and substrate types or what can naturally repair itself each year.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

As set forth in law, the mission of the Forest Service is to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people. The Forest Service has responsibility for implementing the Forest Plan by completing analysis and evaluation of site-specific projects. The Forest Plan guides natural resource management activities and provides the Forest Service, forest users, and the public with an overall strategy for managing the Forest. The intent of these plans is to manage National Forest System lands for multiple-use and not for any single purpose.

Based on Forest Plan direction, the Forest-wide Travel Management Environmental Analysis, the Sierra Madre Roads Analysis Report, and the analysis area's current existing condition versus the desired condition, the Forest Service has identified the following resource needs or Proposed Actions:

1) Allotment Management Plan Revision

As described in the Existing Condition segment of this report, some unsatisfactory condition rangelands have been identified within the analysis area, and livestock grazing is an important factor in preventing or retarding improvement of ***some*** of those areas. Of primary concern are the 400 acres of unsatisfactory condition riparian and wet meadow habitat types. Though 400 acres represent a very small percentage of the total National Forest acres within this analysis area, they warrant improved management because of the watershed function, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities they provide.

- ***There is a need to revise the Beaver Creek, Big Creek, and Six Mile Allotment Management Plans to bring authorized livestock grazing into compliance with Forest Plan Direction, Standards and Guidelines.***
- ***There is a need to comply with the 1995 Rescissions Act by updating and/or revising these allotment management plans (AMPs) within the mandated 15-year period.***

Allotment Management Plan Revision Proposed Action

Big Creek Allotment:

- Short duration use on Black Cat Pastures, with time of use varied early, mid, and late season. Length of grazing season in Black Cat Pasture would be reduced from 81 days presently permitted to 14 days. There would be no change in permitted head months, since more cattle would be run to offset the shorter grazing season.*

- Four pasture rest rotation utilizing Big Creek, Cunningham, and Holroyd Pastures in combination with a private land pasture in Big Creek Park. One Forest Service Pasture would be rested each year. Length of use in the Forest Service Pastures would be no longer than present season lengths, and could be shorter, depending upon how long the private pasture is used. Initially, there would be a use level of 1,921 yearling months when Big Creek Pasture is rested and 1,509 head months when Holroyd or Cunningham pastures are rested. Monitoring will show whether stocking rates in the pastures can be increased as a result of the benefits of a rest rotation system. Adjusted stocking level once the system has been in place for a few years will likely fall below 2,142 yearling months (the present permitted use level) but above 1,509 yearling months.*
- Reconstruct and/or partially reconstruct existing fences as needed over the life of the AMP.
- Construct 1 small stock pond in draw north of Big Creek Canyon (Cunningham Pasture) in NW, NW, Sec. 32, T.13N., R.81W. to reduce livestock use of riparian habitat in the vicinity.
- Construct a small (approximately 60 acres) short duration use pasture on the draw below the new pond if the pond and new management system do not promote recovery to satisfactory condition.

Beaver Creek Allotment:

- Implement a deferred grazing system in which cattle do not go onto the allotment until August 1 or later. The north 1/5 of the allotment is used for the last few weeks of the season (what the permittee has voluntarily been doing the past few years). This is considered deferred use because the cattle do not come onto the allotment until after forage plants have matured and set seed. This system shortens the grazing season by one month from what the present permit and AMP specify. No change in permitted head months since more cattle would be run to offset the shorter grazing season.*
- Partial and/or total reconstruction of existing fences, as needed, over the life of the Allotment Management Plan.
- Close and rehabilitate the unauthorized motorized trail up Little Beaver Creek. Permittees will still be permitted to trail cattle up this route once each year, but may not use motorized vehicles.

Six Mile Allotment:

- Implement a multi-pasture deferred rotation while maintaining flexibility to run as a 4-pasture system with a maximum 102-day season or a 2-pasture system with a shorter (40-day) season. Permitted head months would not change from what is presently permitted since more cattle would be run when shorter grazing seasons are used. *
- Improve four spring developments by enlarging fenced areas around the springs, reconstructing collection systems, and relocating water tanks up out of the draw bottoms. Spring developments slated for improvement include:

S1 Campground Pasture, SE ¼ Sec. 5, T.12N., R.80W.

S2 At Campground/Middle pasture boundary, Sec. 9, T.12N., R.80W.

S3 Middle Pasture, SW ¼, Sec. 10, T.12N., R.80W.

S5 South Pasture, SE ¼ Sec .15, T.12N., R.80W.

- Construct approximately ½ mile of let-down drift fence in the South Pasture in SE ¼ Section 15 and NE ¼, NE, ¼ Sec. 22, T.12N., R.80W. to keep cattle from trailing along two draws that lead down to the North Platte River.

*For all allotments the Forest Plan requires that livestock will be moved to the next pasture and/or removed from the allotment when maximum allowable use levels are reached in key grazing areas, even if this is earlier than the day livestock are normally scheduled to move off a pasture or off the allotment. This means the permittee may not always be able to utilize their fully permitted AUMs, depending on annual weather and forage conditions and livestock management practices.

2) Travel Management

Phase 2 of the Forest-wide Travel Management Decision (October 2000) requires completion of site-specific travel management analyses to decide the future of the Forest Transportation System.

The purpose of the travel management proposal is to determine whether or not unplanned and unmanaged user-created roads and trails will be added to the Forest Transportation System, whether or not additional motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities should be developed, or if existing Forest Transportation routes should be opened or closed.

To identify roads to be decommissioned, the interdisciplinary team reviewed the area bordering the North Platte River, which includes Six Mile Allotment and the Black Cat Pasture of Big Creek Allotment. Travel management in the remainder of the analysis area (Wyoming portion) was covered under the Blackhall-McAnulty Decision. A preliminary analysis revealed that there are a number of roads within the area requiring maintenance and/or repairs to reduce soil erosion and sediment entering area creeks. In addition, high open road density could potentially be degrading wildlife security areas and habitat. Closing or decommissioning routes that have the potential, through continued use, to create resource damage will contribute to improved ecosystem and watershed health.

Implementation of this proposal will help to reduce soil erosion and sediment entering area creeks. Approximately 3,389 acres have been designated crucial deer and elk winter range in the Six Mile area. Forest Plan guidelines for this management area are to close roads as needed, to prevent disturbance during the winter and fawning/calving periods. Big game will also benefit from increased forage on closed roadbeds, increased travel distance without crossing an open road, and increased number of security areas where animals can get away from potential traffic.

- ***There is a need to identify a manageable future transportation system within area that provides adequate area access for both recreational and management activities while minimizing resource damage and/or degradation.***
- ***There is a need to improve the area's wildlife habitat capability and minimize human-caused soil erosion within the area.***

Travel Management Proposed Action

This proposal would complete "Phase 2" travel management analysis in this project area, as described in the Forest-wide Travel Management Decision (October 2000). Under the current proposal, approximately 5.7 miles of road would be considered for closure (see Figure 3), removing them from the Forest Service road system, and 1.8 miles would be converted to a foot/horse trail (Road 4560). Most proposed decommissioned segments and closures are short spurs or have parallel roads (that will remain open) within one mile.

Road decommissioning results in the deactivation of a road currently on the National Forest road system. There are roads no longer needed for permanent access as the result of evolving Forest land management allocations and current access needs. Decommissioning includes treatments that range from blocking or signing the entrance, scattering limbs and rocks on the roadbed, revegetation, water barring, removing road fills, reestablishing drainage-ways, and pulling back unstable shoulders--to full obliteration by recontouring slopes.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

The following potential issues and concerns were identified through internal scoping:

- Impacts to approximately 400 acres of riparian areas and wet meadows from livestock use levels in excess of Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.
- Impacts of roads on big game winter range and soil stability within the portion of the analysis area lying along the west side of the North Platte River.

Based on your comments, these issues will be refined, expanded, and new ones identified as needed. Major issues will be identified, and alternatives to the proposed action(s) will be developed to respond to the major issues.

Any comments submitted in response to the previous scoping letter will be considered as part of the analysis.

ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

The interdisciplinary team will prepare an environmental analysis (EA) to disclose a more detailed description of the proposed actions, as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. The EA will summarize the potential changes to the environment due to implementation of the alternatives. The Responsible Official will consider the environmental effects of implementing the proposed actions, as well as the No Action alternative and any other alternatives described in the EA, and determine whether or not the proposed actions will take place. Both the EA and the decision documents will be posted on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest website. The Brush Creek/Hayden District Ranger will be the Responsible Official for these proposals.

To ensure consideration in this process, comments on the proposed actions to be analyzed and documented in an Environmental Analysis must be submitted within 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the *Rawlins Daily Times*. Please address your comments to Terry DeLay, ID Team Leader, USDA Forest Service, PO Box 249, Saratoga WY 82331. Those commenting should include (1) name and address, (2) title of the proposed action, and (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider. E-mail: comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-routt-brush-creek-hayden@fs.fed.us. (Acceptable format for electronic comments: rtf, pdf, word)

Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following:

(i) Name and address;
(ii) Title of the proposed action;
(iii) Specific substantive comments (§215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
(iv) Signature or other verification of identity upon request;
(v) Individual members of an organization must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility; comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only;
(vi) Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone or in person.

Figure 3 – Travel Management Map